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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 000196

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/27/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [MOPS](#) [PBTS](#) [RU](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: RUSSIAN SOLDIER FLEES TO GEORGIA

REF: TBILISI 148

Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[11](#). (U) On January 27 Russian Defense Ministry Spokesman Colonel Aleksandr Drobyshevskiy announced that Georgian special services had captured Junior Sergeant Aleksandr Glukhov of the Russian army the previous night (reftel). Drobyshevskiy said that Glukhov's statements that he fled his post in the Akhalkgori Valley in South Ossetia and sought asylum in Georgia due to the poor living conditions he endured were made "under physical or moral duress." He added that "Russia demands Glukhov's immediate release."

[12](#). (C) Analysts here discounted Drobyshevskiy's argument and told us they were not surprised by Glukhov's decision to run away. Executive Secretary of the Union of Soldiers' Mothers Committees Valentina Melnikova told us that this is a "standard story that represents nothing special." Numerous Russian soldiers desert and run to foreign countries every year, she said. While her organization has not been contacted regarding this particular case, she said that soldiers' living conditions in South Ossetia were known to be poor, with many soldiers living without heat or hot water. (Note: Glukhov stated in an interview that he had not been able to bathe in over a month.) She labeled the idea that Georgian special services would kidnap a Russian soldier "stupid."

[13](#). (C) Comment: To have a soldier desert and seek asylum in Georgia is a true embarrassment for the Russian military. The difficulties faced by Russian soldiers are well known, and so we therefore see no reason to doubt Glukhov's version of events. Because of political pressure to present this as a "kidnapping," the Russian military may avoid the resignations that should flow from this debacle. End Comment.
BEYRLE